

FORT OF KALINJAR

AND ITS MEDIEVAL STRUCTURES

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The Celebrated hill fort of Kalinjar¹ (Kalanjar) is presently situated in the village of Tarahati under the Naraini tahsil (District Banda) around 20 miles south west of tahsil and 33 miles south east of Banda in Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh on the border with Madhya Pradesh.² It stands on an isolated flat-topped hill of the Vindhya Range, which rises to a height of 244m. above the plain.³ The fort is aligned in an east-west direction, being nearly a mile in length and half a mile in breadth. Built on strong 25-30 metre wide foundations, this Chandela fort has a height of around 30-25 metre with a summit which is 8 metres wide. It has a length of 7.5 k.m. The material used in its construction is the large sand stone and granite pieces put over each other with an occasional use of lime mortar as cementing material.

Nizamuddin writes that, “this fort was unparalleled in the whole of Hindustan for strength”.⁴ Similarly Arif Qandhari, describing this fort writes:

“Kalinjar is one of the strongest and highest forts of Hindustan. Its edifices too were the envy of paradise, its balconies were likewise the envy thereof, its crenelles excelled the constellation plebeians (in Turus) and the depth of its moats was greater than even the very bottom of the earth. The breeze, carrying the clouds trembles to touch its courtyards, and the world covering lightning too genuflects its knee in its depth”.⁵

In the similar fashion, Hasan Nizami (A.D. 1205-1217) gives the account of investment of Kalinjar by Qutubuddin Aibek⁶ in his *Tajul-Maathir* states that:

“The fort of Kalinjar which was celebrated throughout the world for being as strong as the wall of Alexander was taken”.⁷

Abul Fazl, too praises the fort of Kalinjar to a great extent.⁸

According to Ferishta, Kalinjar was founded by Raja Kedar, a contemporary of Mahmud.⁹ But the first person of note in connection with Kalinjar, according to the local tradition, was Chandra Brim or Varman, the reputed ancestor of the celebrated Chandel family of Rajputs. Subsequently, he laid the foundation of the fort of Kalinjar.

Oral tradition recorded by Vincent Smith¹⁰ states that Bundelkhand or *Jejakabhukti*¹¹ was occupied by the Gaharwars and after them by

Pratiharas¹² before the Chandellas¹³ came to it.¹⁴ Sometime before 954 A.D., Kalinjar passed into the hands of the Chandellas, with whom the city and fort of Kalinjar are closely identified. In fact Kalinjar with its strong fortress, Ajaigarh with its palace and Khajuraho with its magnificent temples, are usually regarded as the military, civil & religious Capitals of the Chandellas. The first King of this family who founded the kingdom is said in this record to be Nannuka, whose reign from 831 to 850 A.D. Nizamuddin and Firista however mentions that the forces of Mahammad of Ghazni encircled the fort in 1023¹⁵, but soon there was a treaty of peace between Muhammad and King, when Prithviraj Chauhan defeated the Chandels shifted their capital to Kalinjar fort from Mahoba. Qutubuddin Aibek captured the fort in 1203¹⁶. Some time by the end of the 13th century the fort passed into the hands of the Bundelas. Ultimately Humayun from 1530 to 1545 kept continuous attempts to capture the fort.¹⁷

The fort was subsequently captured by the Surs in a famous battle fought in 1545 in which Sher Shah lost his life.¹⁸ The author of *Tarikh-i Daudi* describes the efforts of Sher Shah during a period of seven months, to capture Kalinjar. After his accidental death, his son Jalal Khan took the fort and coronated himself and assumed the title of Islam Shah. In the time of the disturbance of the Afghans, Raja Ram Chand, Raja of Panna, bought it from Bijli Khan, the adopted son of Bihar Khan for a large sum.¹⁹ Mughal re-occupation of Kalinjar under Akbar took place in A.D. 1569, under Majnun Khan Qaqsal and the area was granted as jagir to Raja Birbal, one of the Nine Jewel's of Akbar.²⁰ Under Akbar, Kalinjar formed one of the nine Sarkars (*districts*) of suba Allahabad (*Ilahabas*).²¹ Towards the end of the reign of Aurangzeb, when he was campaigning the Deccan, the Bundela chief Chhatrasal captured Kalinjar in 1700.²² Finally the fort of Kalinjar passed to the British hands in 1812. Before the capture of Kalinjar fort by the British, the fort was held by the Chaubes.

Here an attempt is being made to present a report of a survey of medieval structures within the Kalinjar fort.²³ During 16th and early seventeenth centuries an architectural tradition developed in the region of Bundelkhand which is now referred to as the Budela style of architecture. The beginning of this style goes back to Rana Kumbha (1428-68) who as early as the middle of the fifteenth century construct a palace at Chitorgarh. Further progress was made under the patronage of the Sultan of Mandu who at Chanderi erected a number of buildings which in their distinctive style became the model for the developing architecture of Bundelkhand. This style, as it finally developed is based on the contemporary productions of the Sultans of Delhi, overlaid with elements of indigenous Indian extractions to suit the

taste, mode of living and traditions of the Rajput rulers.²⁴ They represent an occasion when the demand created the supply, for it is quite clear that the intelligent patronage accorded to them by the ruling powers brought out the genius of the local workmen. The fine flowering of which is still illustrated by these grand palaces.

An exploration of the fort of Kalinjar reveals at least forty structures of which 22 are religious and 15 are secular[See Map I]. Among the religious structures, kunds(water tanks dominated) followed by a few temples, two mosques and two tombs. Among the secular structures there are eight gateways and seven palaces.

Although it is quite difficult to date most of these structures, however, from their styles, names and references, it can be safely surmised that most of the prominent gateways, starting with the Alamgir Darwaza [no.1, Plate I] to the Bada Darwaza belong to the late Mughal period: they reveal the typical architectural features and styles of the Mughal portals. Some of these gateways are in the form of grand-portals, *aiwans*, having the typical arch-and-panel articulation with a large deeply recessed and four-centred central arch flanked with raised platforms(*chabutaras*) on the sides. The terrace of the portals are graced with merlons and battlements[Plate II]. Rosettes on rectangular bases are embraced on the *spandrils* of most of these gateways. On one of the gates, the Bada Darwaza [no.9, See Plate III] cupolas decorated the sides of the gate. Quite reminiscent of the Akbari architecture, some of these are arcuated from the exterior and trabeated from the internal side. The *Chabutaras* flanking the gates are typically decorated with strings of inverted bud motifs and decorated brackets.



Plate I



Plate II



Plate I

Plate III

The *Budhabhadra* gateway

[no.4,Plate IV], is however trabeated from both the sides. It is raised with the help of carved rectangular columns surmounted with heavy brackets. The carvings are in the form of geometrical designs and patterns.



Plate IV

The two mosques within the fort, on the other hand appear to date to an earlier period. The Qanati Mosque [no.23,Plan I & Plate V] reveals few features prominent during the Tughlaq period in the form of cyclopean rounded bastions and pointed arches. The *qibla* wall is marked by a triple-arched screen, the central arch of which is higher than the two flanking arches. Carved pilasters, tapering turrets and heaving lime pilaster, are other prominent features of this mosque. Inverted lotus motifs cover the domical endings of the turrets. The only inscription which decorates this structure is an a rectangular panel in the form of a *taq*, which one generally encounters during the structures built during the reign of Jahangir. This inscription however does not contain any date. It is a religious incantation invoking the name of 'Ali, the 'nad-i Ali'. It appears that this small mosque was initially constructed sometime during the Tughluq period and renovated and rebuilt sometime during the reign of Jahangir.



Plate V

The second mosque, known as the mosque of Islam Shah [no.21. See Plan II & Plate VI] is situated north bank of Kot Tirth. The western prayer chamber of the mosque is totally trabeated. It is seven aisled and three bays deep. The *mimbar* of the mosque is situated just in the middle of the mosques in front of a rear-projected wall which probably could have been the central *mihrab*. Two smaller *mihrabs* with ogee



Plate VI

flank this on both sides. An inscription carved on a pillar shaft attributes the construction of the *masjid-i jami* to Islam Shah, the son of Sher Shah 'also converted the place from darul harb to darul Islam'. It is also interesting to note that no pillar-shaft in this mosque similar: some of the

shafts are circular, the others square, some broad, others slender[See plan]. This mosque appears to have been constructed with the help of re-used materials. It further appears that some other structure was converted into a mosque.

The seven palace structures within the fort probably belong to the late-Mughal period. All of them are constructed with rubble stones covered with thick layer of lime mortar.

A palace constructed in the middle of the fort near the water reservoir known as Kot Tirth, is known as the Aman Singh Palace [no.20, See Plan III & Plate VII]. We know that Aman Singh Bundela was a grand grandson of Chhatarsal who succeeded to the throne in 1752.²⁵ The next palace to be constructed appears to be the so-called 'Rani Mahal' situated in the north of the fort [no.27, See plan IV & Plate VIII]. The Chaube Mahal, [no.28, Plan V & Plate IX] by popular

legend, was constructed by Kaim ji Chaube, the *qila'dar* sometime during the late 18th Century. The other palaces, viz. the 'Rang Mahal' [no.38, Plan VI & Plate X], 'Venkat Bihari Mahal' [no.27, Plan VII & Plate XI], 'the Zakira Mahal' [no.39] and 'Moti Mahal' [no.40] were built sometime in between the Aman Singh Palace and Chaube Mahal.

It is quite interesting to note that all these structures are double storied and constructed on a plan which rotates around a centrally located courtyard.

Built of rubble stones covered with a heavy layer of lime-mortar, all these palaces are decorated with cupolas (*Chhatris*), *bangle* roofs,



Plate VII



Plate VIII



Plate IX



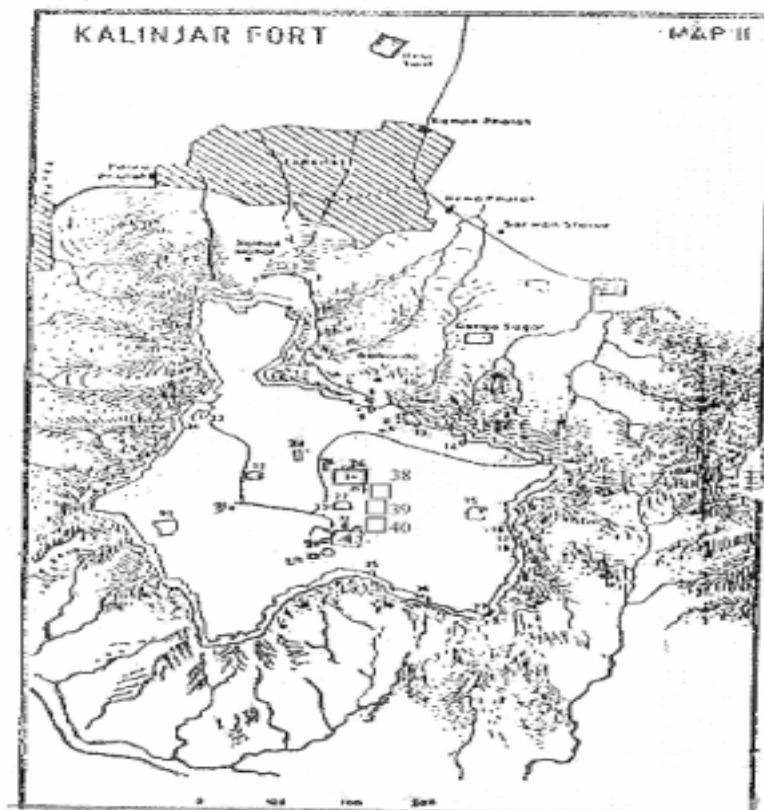
Plate X

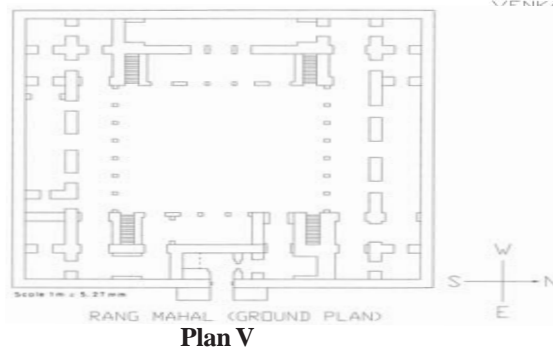
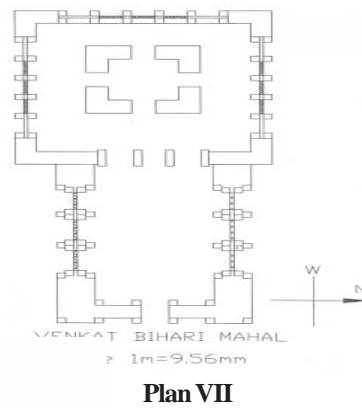
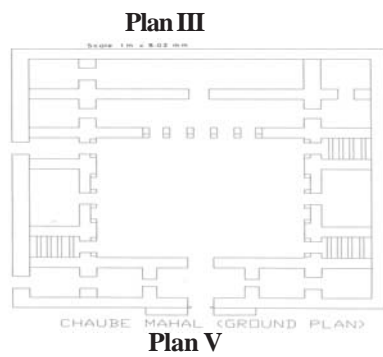
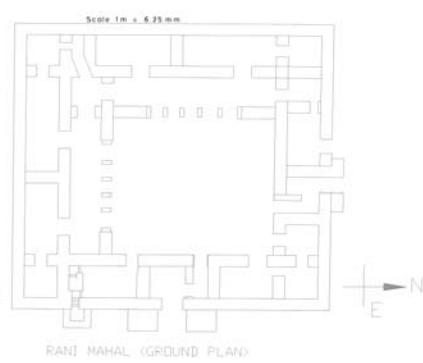
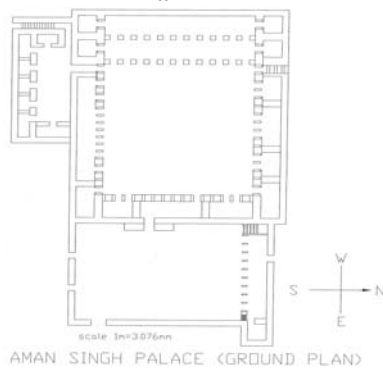
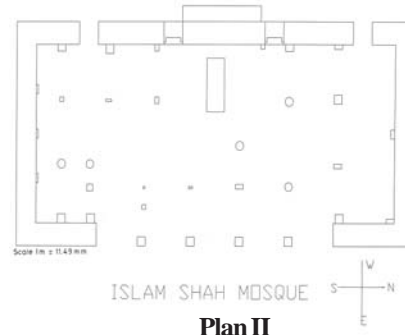
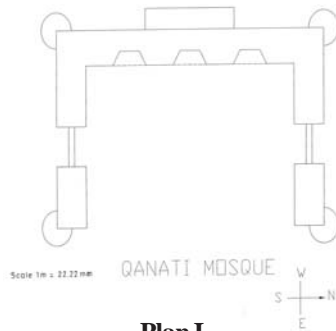


Plate XI

Index to the Map I

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|---|--|
| 1. Alam /Alamgir Darwaza | 21. Islam Shah mosque |
| 2. Ganesh Darwaza | 22. Sanichari talao |
| 3. Chandi/Chauburji Darwaza | 23. Qanati mosque |
| 4. Budhabhadra Darwaza | 24. Grave yard |
| 5. Gate leading to Balkhandi Mahadeo | 25. Tomb |
| 6. Hanuman Darwaza | 26. Tomb |
| 7. Hanuman Kund | 27. 'Rani Mahal' & 'Venkat Bihari Mahal' |
| 8. Lal Darwaza | 28. Chaube Mahal |
| 9. Bada Darwaza | 29. Bijli talao |
| 10. Bhairon Kund | 30. Ram katora talao |
| 11. Sita sej | 31. Dak Bungalow |
| 12. Sita Kund | 32. Taliyya talao("Ramna") |
| 13. Patal ganga | 33. Parmarddi Gate of Nilkantha Temple |
| 14. Pandu Kund | 34. Nilkantha Temple |
| 15. Budhbhadra talao("Budhi Budha/burhiya") | 35. Mrigdhara |
| 16. Pani Ki Aman Kund | 36. Bhairon Ka Jhirka |
| 17. Bhagwan sej | 37. Panna Gate |
| 18. Sidh Ki Gupha | 38. 'Rang Mahal' |
| 19. koth tirth | 39. 'Zakira Mahal' |
| 20. Raja Aman Singh Palace | 40. 'Moti Mahal' |





drooping eaves, heavy brackets, multi-foliated cusped arches, baluster columns and oriel windows in the form of Jharokas.

The interior is composed of ranges of apartments alternating with open terraces, communication being obtained by means of passages and corridors.

Besides this, one thing which is common in every building is that every structure has an arcaded portal, with double or triple story effect.

A detailed study of the architectural features of these palaces would reveal the general features of the Bundela architecture, which unfortunately so far has eluded a proper study.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Edwin T. Atkinson, *Statistical Descriptive and historical Account of the North-Western provinces of India*, vol. 1, Allahabad, pp.446-73; Cunningham's *Archaeological report*, vol.XXI, p.20; A.Fuhrer, *The Monumental Antiquities and inscriptions in the North-Western Provinces and Oude*, Varanasi, reprint, 1969, pp.149-54; See also Uttar Pradesh *District Gazetteer's* (Banda) district, Dangle Prasad Varun, pub.Govt of U.P.Deptt. of District Gazetteers, U.P, Lucknow, 1977, pp.
2. The tract of land that lies to the south of Jamna (*Jamuna*) and north of the Vindhya, east of the Betwa or *Vetravali* River, and west of the River Tons or *Tamasa* is now known as Bundelkhand, after the Bundelas, who ruled there from about middle of the 14th Century A.D. Bundelkhand is now a part of Vindhya Pradesh which was formed by union of 35 Baghelkhand and Bundelkhand States on April 2, 1948, which is situated between Uttarpradesh and Madhyapardesh. It comprises four districts of U.P (Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur and Banda) and four districts of M.P (Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur and Panna) together with Lahar (Bhind Districts) and Bhandar (Gwalior District) tahsils in the north-west.
3. According to the Khajuraho Inscription on Dhanga A.D. 954, from the Lakshmana Temple, the great height "impedes the progress of the sun at mid-day", (henceforth EI), vol.I, 127-28. See also Abul Fazal, *Ain-i Akbari*, trans. Jarret, vol.1, Calcutta, 1948, p.170.
4. Khawaja Nizamuddin Bakshi, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, trans., Brajendranath, Delhi, 1991, vol.2, pp.356-57; C.V.Vaidya, *History of Medieval Hindu India*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1979, p.85.
5. Arif Qandhari, *Tarikh-i Akbari*, ed. Muinuddin Nadvi, Azhar Ali Dihalvi & Imtiyaz Ali Arshi, Rampur, 1962, tran. Tasneem Ahmad, Delhi, 1993, p.157.
6. For detailed political history of Kalinjar fort see, Dr.S.A.N.Rezavi's, "The Medieval Fort of Kalinjar and its history", *PIHC*, 63rd session, Amritsar, 2002, pp.1232-1251.
7. Hasan Nizami, *Tajul Ma'asir*, MS. F.185(b); for translation see Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as Told by its own Historians*, vol.ii, London, 1869, pp.231-32; See also Fakhri-i Mudabbir, *Tarikh-i Fakhruddin Mubarakshah*, ed. Denison-Ross, London, 1927, p.25.
8. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali, ASB, Calcutta, vol.1, p.498-99.
9. Atkinson, op.cit.I, pp.446-47.

10. V.A.Smith, *The Early History of India*, pub. Oxford University Press, London (Fourth Edition), 1958, p.405.
11. i.e, the province of Jejaka, the name *Jejaka* or *Jeja* occurs in the inscriptions (*E.P.Ind.I,121*).Compare Tirabhukti, *Tirhut*; At the time of Ashoka's reign it was called *Pulinda* (*Maurya Samrajya ka Itihas*,by S.Vidya,lankat pp.453-455); The Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsang called this province '*Chi Chi Tu*', meaning Jijahuti; Al-Beruni called this province as *Jejahuti* (*Al-Beruni ka Bharat*,p.152)
12. Barah Copper Plate inscription of Bhojdeva Pratihara records a grant made by Bhoj in the *Kalanjara-mandala* in 836 A.D., which shows that Kalinjar was a part of the Pratihara empire at that time. See *EI*. Vol.xix, p.18, line 6.
13. The Chandellas, who was later included among the 36 Rajput clans, claimed to be descended from the sage *Chandra-treya*, who was born of the moon.
14. W.Crook, *The Tribes and Castes of the north Western Provinces and Oudh*, Calcutta, 1816, pp.196-97.
15. Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, op.cit., p.12; Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah, Ferishta, *Gulshan-i ibrahimi or Tarikh-i Firishta*, Lith,Nawal Kishore, Rampir, 1874, vol I, p.63.
16. Hasan Nizami, *Tajul ma'asi,r*, MS. F.185(b); For translation See Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, vol.II, London, 1869, pp.231-32; See also Fakhr-i Mudabbir, *Tarikh-i Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah*,ed.,Denison-Ross, London,1927, p.25.
17. Gulbadan Bano Begum, *Humayun Nama*,ed. A.S.Beveridge, RAS, London, 1902, pt.I, p.22; For a controversy regarding the date of Humayun's expedition, See, K.Qanungo, *Sher Shah and his Times*,1964,pp.120-27; Iqtidar Alam Khan's, "Note on the Chronology_of early moves of Humayun",*PIHC*,Muzaffarpur,1972,pp.391-93.
18. ShaikhRazqullahMushtaqi, *Waqi'at-i-mushtaqi* trans .& ed. IqtidarHussain Siddiqui, pub. Indian Council of Historical Research, N.Delhi,1993,p.157; *Akbar Nama*, op.cit.vol I, pp.400-01; Abbas Khan Sarwani, *Tarikh-i Akbar Shahi* or *Tarikh-i SherShahi* tr. Brahmaler Pardesh Ambastya, Patna, 1962, pp.200-204.
19. *Tarikh-i Akbari*, op.cit.ii, pp.356-57; *Hadikatul-Akalim*, M.H.Bilgrami, p.90; *Akbar-Nama* ,op.cit.ii pp.498-99; *Ma'asir ul Umara*, op.cit.ii, p.105; *Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh*, op. cit. p.120.
20. *Akbar Nama*,op.cot.ii,pp.499;*Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*, op.cit. ii, p.124.
21. *Ain-i Akbari*,op.cit.ii,p.96
22. *Jhansi Gazetteer of India*,M.P(Panna),Sinha,Bhopal,p.64
23. The survey and exploration of the K.F. was conducted in 25.01.2007 to 04.02.2007. I am thankful to Mohd. Saghir who companied me in this survey.
24. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture(Islamic Period)*, Bombay, 1942, p.120.
25. *Gazetteer of India*,M.P. (Panna), Sinha, Bhopal, 1944, p.65; Atkinson, op.cit.,p.455.